

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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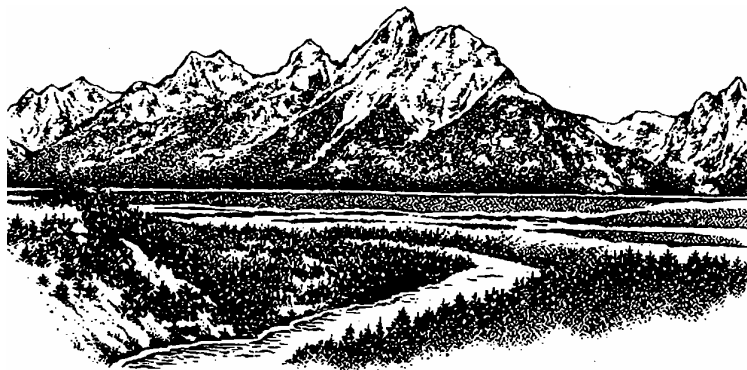
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MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RECREATIONAL FEE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM IN FY-1998: A COMPARISON WITH RESULTS FROM FY-1997

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Monitoring the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program

This Executive Summary highlights findings of an October 1998 survey of National Park Service (NPS) administrators at 119 NPS units participating in the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. In FY-1997, an initial survey of managers was conducted to determine their perceptions regarding the effects of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program on park operations and services during the first year of program operation. Called Phase I, this FY-1997 survey provided baseline information for a three year study on recreation fees and park operations. Following Phase I research, the NPS commissioned a second survey (FY-1998) to document management perceptions of the impact of the program one year after implementation. This report summarizes the comparison of the results of the FY-1998 and FY-1997 surveys of managers.



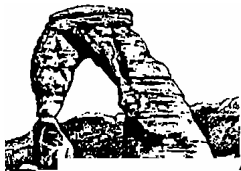
NPS MANAGERS' VIEWS TOWARD THE RECREATIONAL FEE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM -1998

Overall, the results obtained from the FY-1998 survey indicate that NPS managers at units participating in the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program are positive about the program. In most cases, the results from the FY-1998 survey closely parallel those identified in the initial FY-1997 survey. (See Executive Summary No. I, 1997, for first year survey results.)

Managers See Positive Effect on Quality of Visitor Service

Management responses to changes in the quality of services and facilities at their units

were similar for most items in both surveys. However, substantive differences were identified in four items. In FY-1998, a higher proportion of managers perceived quality improvements in the maintenance of



visitor facilities (from 29.0% in FY-1997 to 36.2% in FY-1998), staff availability to manage fee-based programs (from 50.5% in FY-1997 to 56.4% in FY-1998), and the condition of park facilities (from 43.0% in FY-1997 to 53.8% in FY-1998). Yet, at the same time in FY-1998 a slightly higher percentage of respondents felt fee collection procedures had not improved from the previous year, (from 3.1% in FY-1997 to 6.8% in FY-1998).

Management Perceptions of Impact on Visitation Patterns

In terms of management perceptions of visitation patterns to their parks, there were virtually no differences in response patterns from the first year to the second. When asked if they thought that the implementation of the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program Influenced the patterns of visitation to their parks, 14.0% of respondents in the FY-1998 survey indicated that they felt it had, while 78.0% felt it had not. Only a few respondents provided additional information on the perceived reasons for changes in visitation: four indicated an overall decrease in visitation due to the fee program, three noted fewer repeat visits by local visitors, and two indicated an increased level of visitation to their parks on weekends.

Managers' Perceptions of Program Administration

The survey included a question pertaining to aspects of park operations that were most negatively affected by implementation of the fee program. Shifts greater than 5% between FY-1997 and FY-1998 were observed for three out of 11 response categories. In FY-1998, substantially fewer managers perceived a negative effect involving staff time and workload concerns associated with the fee program. Yet, there was a slight increase in the number of managers reporting negative effects

pertaining to program administration and visitor information services.

For all but two of the items addressing problems with fiscal management at the local level, the percent of managers indicating no encounters with problems was virtually identical from FY-1997 to FY-1998. In FY-1998, more managers did, however, report problems in tracking account balances from (6.7% in FY-1997 to 14.5% in FY-1998). In contrast, a higher proportion of managers indicated there were no problems in making deposits of fee program funds (from 77.6% in FY-1997 to 85.5% in FY-1998).

The percent of managers indicating no encounters with problems emanating from fiscal management at the regional level was virtually identical in FY-1997 and FY-1998. There were slight changes from FY-1997 to FY-1998 in three items. In FY-1998, a proportion of managers indicated there were no problems in having funds deposited (from 85.4% in FY-1997 to 92.0% in FY-1998). However, slightly more respondents reported problems with making fiscal changes/corrections (from 3.9% in FY-1997 to 4.4% in FY-1998) and with the timing and availability of electronic reports (from 2.0% in FY-1997 to 8.8% in FY-1998).

For several items presented in the survey concerning problems with fiscal management at the national level, the proportion of managers indicating a national-origin problem was higher in FY-1998 than in FY-1997. Specifically, the proportion of managers indicating unresolved and continuing national-origin problems is substantially larger than in the previous year. These items are timing and availability of electronic reports (from 3.1% in FY-1997 to 15.3% in FY-1998), difficulty in tracking account balances (from 8.2% in



FY-1997 to 19.8% in FY-1998), and difficulty in making fiscal changes / corrections (from 5.3% in FY-1997 to 14.4% in FY-1998).



The proportion of managers indicating that funds were allocated quickly enough to be used effectively was slightly

higher in FY-1998 (75.0%) than in FY-1997 (68.3%).

Use of Fee Program Funds

Two substantial shifts in how FY-1998 fee program revenues have been used stood out from the previous year. The proportion of managers who indicated using program revenues to reduce priority projects declined from 83.2% in FY-1997 to 73.6% in FY-1998. On the other hand, the proportion indicating that program revenues were used to manage the collection and allocation of new fee revenues increased substantially from 51.5% in FY-1997 to 81.8% in FY-1998.

Among the 14 specific fee-revenue use categories listed in the survey, noteworthy shifts were observed for four items from FY-1997 to FY-1998. Lower proportions of managers reported use of funds for new and improved rest rooms (from 35.4% in FY-1997 to 24.8% in FY-1998) and building maintenance (from 44.4% in FY-1997 to 35.6% in FY-1998); higher proportions reported use of revenues for signs (from 37.4% in FY-1997 to 46.0% in FY-1998) and the costs of implementing and managing fee programs (from 70.7% in FY-1997 to 88.5% in FY-1998).

END NOTES

Study Methods

The purposes of the FY-1998 research were:

- to document management impressions of the impact of the program on park operations and visitor services in the second year of operation; and
- to examine similarities and differences in patterns of response to questionnaire items

from FY-1997 to FY-1998 on the basis of NPS unit managers.

The survey, "1998 Management Assessment of the National Park Service Recreational Fee Demonstration Program: FY-1998 Survey", was printed in booklet format. Cover letters explaining the purpose of the survey were personalized with the name and address of the administrator contacted at each NPS Unit and were hand signed by the project scientist responsible for contacting that unit. The first wave of survey materials (including cover letter, questionnaire, and return envelope) was sent via first class mail on October 15, 1998.

The survey was mailed to the 119 NPS units in the study. Follow-up letters and telephone calls to thank responding units and to solicit participation of nonrespondents continued through early December. By December 18, 1998, all participating units (100% response rate) had completed the survey.

Related Literature

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